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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EI](#)
SUBJECT: IRISH SUPPORT EU-SYRIA ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT

REF: STATE 1985

Classified By: Pol/Econ Section Chief Ted Pierce;
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) POLOFF delivered reftel demarche on January 12, 2009 to Pat Kelly, Director, Middle East and North Africa Division, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and his deputy, Stephen Dawson, DFA's Iran/Syria expert. Dawson indicated that the EU intends to continue preparations for the Agreement, but is not prepared to sign quite yet. He acknowledged U.S. concerns. Nonetheless, he noted that Ireland and other EU member states see Syria as being somewhat more responsive recently, seemingly more inclined to play a constructive role in the Middle East, and interested in developing closer ties with nations other than Iran. Such positive movement should be rewarded, Dawson said, not lead to greater isolation of a key player in the Middle East peace process. He pointed out that Association Agreements are the mechanism the EU uses to engage its neighbors, and commented that it would be inconsistent (from the Irish and EU perspective) to deny an Association Agreement with Syria while staunchly defending the existing Association Agreement with Israel in the face of public demands that it be abrogated in response to Israel's recent incursion into Gaza. The bottom line, Kelly said, was that Ireland would support EU efforts to achieve broader engagement with Syria through an Association Agreement.
FAUCHER